

Thinking Aloud With a Narrative Picture Book in Grades 3–5

Doctor De Soto by William Steig

Overview and Rationale

Doctor De Soto is a talented and sought-after dentist who is assisted by his wife. Animals—large and small—seek him out for his ability to stop their pain. Since he is a mouse, he refuses to treat animals who have a taste for mice. One day, he takes mercy on a fox suffering from a toothache. In a race to see who outfoxes whom, this picture book has readers rooting for the De Sotos.

Lexile Framework: 560L

Guided Reading Level: M

What the Text Says	What I Say	The Comprehension Strategy I Model
Larger animals sat on the floor, while Doctor De Soto stood on a ladder. (p. 1)	<i>The author is telling me that small animals are close to Doctor De Soto's size and that he needs a ladder to reach bigger animals, so I can guess that Doctor De Soto is small too—maybe a squirrel, or a mouse, or a hamster.</i>	 Making inferences
There Doctor De Soto was hoisted up to the patient's mouth by his assistant, who happened to be his wife. (p. 2)	<i>I'm getting the sense that Doctor De Soto has lots of patients—animals of all sizes. He seems to be a talented and popular dentist.</i>	 Synthesizing
Doctor De Soto was especially popular with the big animals. (p. 4)	<i>When I hear big animals, I think of things like elephants and horses. I wonder why they like him so much.</i>	 Asking questions
... they could hardly feel any pain. (p. 4)	<i>Before I asked why the big animals liked him, and I get information here that tells me he is a delicate dentist who barely hurts his patients.</i>	 Monitoring and clarifying
Being a mouse ... (p. 5)	<i>Aha! I was right that Doctor De Soto is small.</i>	 Monitoring and clarifying
They wouldn't even admit the most timid looking cat. (p. 5)	<i>The big idea here is that there are no cats allowed. Are there any other animals that are dangerous to mice?</i>	 Synthesizing  Asking questions
... they saw a well-dressed fox with a flannel bandage around his jaw. (p. 6)	<i>I wonder how Doctor De Soto and his wife will handle this. I'm guessing foxes are dangerous to mice, so he will be forbidden.</i>	 Making inferences
And he wept so bitterly it was pitiful to see. (pp. 7–8)	<i>At first I thought that Doctor De Soto wouldn't help the fox, but now I'm thinking that because the fox is so miserable, he will allow him in.</i>	 Synthesizing

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What the Text Says	What I Say	The Comprehension Strategy I Model
She pressed the buzzer and let the fox in. (p. 9)	<i>Why do they change their mind? I'm seeing these characters now as very sympathetic toward the fox.</i>	 Asking questions  Monitoring and clarifying
"... and remove the bandage, please." (pp. 10–11)	<i>I like how the author shows the fox begging and in terrible pain to show me why the De Sotos changed their minds.</i>	A Understanding the author's purpose
... and his jaw began to quiver. (pp. 12–13)	<i>When I first met the fox, I thought he was in such pain that he'd never hurt the mice. But now I'm thinking that the fox will not be able to resist temptation and will try to eat the De Sotos!</i>	 Synthesizing
"Wide open!" yelled his wife. (p. 13)	<i>At first, I wasn't sure about the word quiver. I know quiver means to shake, and at first I thought his mouth was quivering because he was in so much pain. But when I reread it and noticed the phrase despite his misery, I thought his mouth was shaking because he wanted to close it with Doctor De Soto and his wife inside!</i>	 Monitoring and clarifying
"You won't feel a feel when I yank that tooth." (p. 14)	<i>I was confused at first with gas. I was thinking the doctor was giving him gas like we give our cars gas! But when I kept reading, I realized he was using gas to numb the fox and make him not feel pain.</i>	 Monitoring and clarifying
"How I love them raw ... with just a pinch of salt, and a ... dry ... white wine." (p. 14)	<i>Hmm, I know here he's talking in his sleep because the author gives the clue of dreamland. But I wonder what he is talking about. What does he love raw, with salt and white wine?</i>	 Asking questions
Mrs. De Soto handed her husband a pole to keep the fox's mouth open. (p. 15)	<i>I'm getting the sense here that Doctor De Soto and his wife think the fox is talking about how he loves mice and calls them yummy! Maybe they are using the pole so he can't snap his jaws shut and eat them.</i>	 Making inferences
... if it would be shabby of him to eat the De Sotos when the job was done. (pp. 16–17)	<i>I like how the author makes it so the fox has to wait and come back for his new tooth. It makes the story go on longer and builds suspense for me.</i>	A Understanding the author's purpose
"They're wicked, wicked creatures." (p. 18)	<i>I'm really getting the sense here that Doctor De Soto and his wife are plotting something. They call themselves foolish to trust a fox, but they are still planning to give him a new tooth. I like how the author introduced conflict between Doctor De Soto and his wife—she thinks the fox is trustworthy, but he is suspicious of the fox. This conflict makes me want to keep reading to see if either of them is right!</i>	 Making inferences A Understanding the author's purpose
A minute later he was snoring. (p. 19)	<i>Now I'm really curious to see what this plan is! I wonder what they are plotting.</i>	 Asking questions

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... and laughed. "Just a joke!" he chortled. (pp. 20–21)	<i>I like how the author has the fox snap his mouth shut here as a joke. The mood was so tense up until this point, and the author used a bit of humor to break through some of the tension.</i>	A Understanding the author's purpose
... and hooked it up to the teeth on both sides. (pp. 21–22)	<i>I'm getting these clues that the fox is really appreciative—he loves the gold tooth, he's cheerful because he's not in pain, and he's making jokes. That makes me think that the fox will not try to eat the De Sotos.</i>	III Making inferences
"On the other hand, how can I resist?" (p. 22)	<i>This word shouldn't be important to me—and so is the phrase on the other hand. The author is telling me that the fox is really in a dilemma. He doesn't want to eat the De Sotos, but he's not sure he can say no to the temptation!</i>	A Understanding the author's purpose
"... How would you like to be the first one to receive this unique treatment?" (p. 23)	<i>Now I think that something is going on with this preparation. I know the De Sotos were up late at night making a plan, and all of a sudden, they are introducing this brand-new application. I think it's a trick, and I want to read on to see if the fox will fall for it.</i>	6 Synthesizing
... with the help of his brand-new tooth. (p. 24)	<i>I was a bit confused when I saw that the words no one were in italics. I know the author uses that to show something important. When I wasn't sure why he said no one would see them again, I read more to find out that the fox is going to eat them. So when he says no one will see them again, the fox means that they will be gone forever in his belly!</i>	↔ Monitoring and clarifying A Understanding the author's purpose
The fox looked very happy. (p. 25)	<i>I like how the author shows here that everyone is relaxed—Doctor De Soto is humming, his wife is helping out her husband, and the fox is happy. It makes me think that the De Sotos have no idea what the fox is planning to do—and the fox has no idea that the De Sotos are plotting something!</i>	A Understanding the author's purpose
... but his teeth were stuck together! (p. 26)	<i>Stuck together! I wonder if there was something—like super glue—in that gold tooth to make it so that he couldn't open his mouth again!</i>	? Asking questions
"... No pain ever again!" (p. 26)	<i>"Permeate the dentine"? What does that mean? I see a part of dentist in dentine, so I think it has to do with teeth. And maybe permeate has something to do with sitting there. Doctor De Soto is saying the formula won't work unless it permeates the teeth.</i>	↔ Monitoring and clarifying
... He tried to do so with dignity. (p. 27)	<i>The gist here is that the fox knows he got tricked! He can't talk well with his mouth glued shut, and he's trying to leave without being totally embarrassed. I now see that the fox is embarrassed that he was outsmarted.</i>	6 Synthesizing
They kissed each other and took the rest of the day off. (p. 28)	<i>I'm ending the book with questions. Will the fox never be able to open his mouth again? Will the De Sotos ever treat any animals who are dangerous to mice again? What does the fox think about mice now? What do the De Sotos think about foxes now? I know these questions aren't answered in the book, but I sure am curious!</i>	? Asking questions